Reader-Response: Dear Mr. Henshaw

The novel *Dear Mr. Henshaw* presents children with real life situations. The situations that are presented allow children to easily connect with what they are reading. Throughout the story Leigh struggles with the separation of his parents and the absentness of his father. I can personally connect with the way Leigh feels and understand what he is going through. When I was younger than Leigh my parents decided to separate. As I grew older my father became a less active part of my life. I was always mad and upset because I hardly got to see him and I felt like he didn’t care about me as much. It wasn’t until I was in about seventh grade that the feelings I had got worse. At that time my dad and step-mom started dating and with my step-mom came my step-sister. Like Leigh I had trouble coping with the fact that my father was seeing someone else and that that other person also had a child who was taking my father’s attention. Once they got married I felt like I wasn’t of any importance to my father anymore. However, like Leigh I found ways to express my feelings through writing in a diary. I began to cope with my father’s new life.

This type of genre allows young adults to identify more easily with the situations going on the in novel. The author set the novel up in a way that is easy for children to read, but also shows the reader how the main character feels throughout the entire book. Any child who has parents that are divorced or separated can connect with this book. Reading *Dear Mr. Henshaw* can show them that they aren’t the only ones that are going through the same situation. The novel lets the child know that they aren’t alone in that kind of situation and that it can get better. It shows them that what they are feeling is normal. The novel also shows that expression through writing is a good coping tool. Children can see that writing is a good thing and that through their writing anything is possible. I know that if I had read this as a child it would have helped me to better deal with my parent’s separation.

Even though this is a great novel for children in the same situation as Leigh, it also is good for children who aren’t in that kind of situation. This book shows children what their peers might be going through. It lets children see what the real world can be like for some. It shows that not everyone has the same kind of life. It presents children with diversity and a look at what can be going on in the world around them. I think that the textbook *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature* says it best when it says, “Rather than try to shield children from the world they live in, we ought to be trying to give them the tools to read this world carefully and critically.” (Nodelman 31)